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## Husbands, Lovers, and Dreamlovers

Masculinity and Female Desire in Women's Novels of the 1970s

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### ABSTRACT

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While "images of women" have been given much attention by feminist literary critics, female-authored representations of masculinity have largely been neglected. By looking at a range of novels, among them Lisa Alther's *Kunflicks*, Gail Godwin's *Glass People*, Gael Greene's *Blue Skies, No Candy*, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, and Anne Roiphe's *Up the Sandbox!*, this study contributes to filling that critical gap.

The aim of the study is to investigate some of the types of heterosexual masculinity that are activated in American women's novels of the 1970s, and the ways in which these masculinities signify in a feminist context. Chapter One surveys the changes in the understanding of gender representation that have resulted from poststructuralist and feminist interventions in literary and cultural criticism. The following three chapters investigate the figures of the husband (Chapter Two), the lover (Chapter Three), and the dreamlover (Chapter Four). These representations, and the envisioning of female desire in the novels, are viewed as informed by feminist and other debates over sexuality of the 1970s. I argue that, while the cultural ideals of masculinity embodied in the husband and lover figures are presented as desirable, they are paradoxically also disrupted and exposed as inadequate. Unlike these husband and lover figures, the dreamlover figure signals the possibility of a "new" masculinity, one that is not constrained by patriarchal values and traditions. My analyses emphasize the function of representations of masculinity as sites for social and political critique. In particular, I stress the ambiguous and multifaceted aspects of the novels' representations of gender and sexuality, as well as their destabilization of ideals of masculinity and questioning of constructions of female desire.